

De-Cluttering of Lifestyle Through Self-Control: The Most Needed Track to Health Attainment

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Abstract

The present millennium is essentially targeted towards materialistic gains and achievements of varied kinds with individuals focused more on temporary gains. This has taken its toll on both the physical and psychological health spectrum of individuals. It is mostly accumulation of 'clutter' in the psyche that ends up in cluttering the surroundings. The need is felt to look deep into oneself in order to understand, become aware of the wrong-doings and rectify. De-cluttering the lifestyle appears to be the call of the day to instill and maintain health in the long run. This can be done by adopting different physical avenues like exercise, having a balanced diet, maintaining regular sleep hygiene, having control over one's weight, and so forth. A few psychological strategies appear to be deep breathing, meditation, reframing one's negative thoughts, and the like. De-cluttering the self and the surroundings seems to be of dire necessity in the present-day context to help individuals improve their overall quality of life. The present theoretical discourse engages in a humble attempt to look into the nuances of health promotion from a psychosocial perspective.

Keywords: de-cluttering, health, lifestyle, self

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In the day-to-day normal context of life, people in general aspire to have sensorial pleasures of various kinds which is but a natural way of life. But to maintain one's physical as well as mental health, the most needed behavioral component is self-control, and awareness of all of one's doings and their ultimate implications. Indulging in physical and emotional needs comes easily, pointing to the ordinariness of human beings. Yet at the same time, it must be acknowledged that as Homo sapiens, we have a life of the highest cognitive growth. This evolutionary gift must prompt us to realize that health habits are established from the basic stages of life. Health habits include developing healthy and timely food habits, engaging in regular exercises, having sound social interactions, having set personal activities that lead to a sense of achievement, developing mental maturity, and self-realization. These will provide both good physical health and mental stability, inner calmness, and lead to wisdom at a later stage of life. We all should be grateful for the fact that the life we have is in itself an achievement and a precious gift.

'Health is wealth' has been taught to us since our childhood. The playful soul of a child neither understands its importance nor feels the need for taking care of it, since the early stage of life is marked more by impulsive pleasure-seeking behavior. To remain physically and mentally healthy is a step taken towards being realistic, having matured understanding, and adopting self-control. There is an element of impulsivity in each individual which prompts one to look for pleasure which is especially prevalent in today's era of 'instant gratification'. The instant pleasure-giving stimuli are not necessarily good health providers. For instance, it is commonly said that foods which are tasty are our pleasure-points, and food that are not are our health-points. While we cannot alter our environment, we can certainly exercise self-control in order to stay fit and healthy for a long time.

I. Health Promotion: Different Avenues of Its Attainment

Interest and support for health promotion has grown steadily over the years (Lalonde, 1974). A new health consciousness among large segments of the population can be observed in a growing number of countries. The World Health Organization's (WHO) global strategy for 'health for all by the year 2000' called for a reorganization of health policy and health facilities (World Health Organization, 1978). The main aspect of this attempt was that they aimed at the promotion of health and its positive dimensions.

"Health is defined as a state of well-being involving different dimensions, namely, complete physical, mental and social, and not merely the absence of any disease" (WHO, 1948). As such, health may be conceptualized as an ideal goal that can be approached but never attained. It is an abstract state. "The concept of health relates primarily to the individual's ability to achieve his or her potential and to respond positively to the challenges of the environment and seen as a resource for everyday life, and not the object of living" (Stachtchenko & Jenicek, 1990). An interesting structure for health promotion has been presented in which health is defined in terms of three dimensions (Abelin, Brzeziński, & Carstairs, 1987):

- Years to life which contributes to one's life expectancy
- Health to years that may be related to disability-free days
- Life to years which may be related to the concept of wellness

The general philosophy and its fundamental idea of health promotion is that good health is the outcome of personal and collective accomplishment. It requires developing a repertoire of good health habits on the part of the individual early in life so as to carry them forward throughout adulthood and old age. Health behaviours are of much importance at this juncture. These refer to the behaviours people carry out to enhance their health. On the other hand, Poor health behaviours appear to accumulate junk in the body and contribute to illness.

Health habit refers to health-related behaviour which is often internalized on the part of the individual, without his or her own awareness. It develops in childhood and continue

tillage 11 or 12 years to stabilize (Cohen, Tyrrell, & Smith, 1993) like brushing of teeth, taking a healthy diet, running playfully, or having a lot of physical movements. These habits are generally introduced by the caregivers. Hence, health awareness must be a feature of 'elder-mind'; such minds must have clarity regarding their own clutter-free, steady, practiced habit-patterns.

It is high time to place great emphasis on lifestyle modification. Hence focus should be on the decline of health risk behaviours to prevent disease for example smoking termination, reducing too much of consumption of alcohol, improving healthy diet, exercise, and stress control. Therefore, the responsibility lies with the individual who is seen as being the ultimate in-charge of his or her own health status. Health promotion should be concerned with the development of self-concept, life skills, and social skills. In addition to it concern should be on environmental intervention through different political, legislative, financial means. With this novel outlook, health promotion approaches need to be more united and inter-sectoral, paying more care to the assimilation of health among numerous "on-health" dominions. One major aspect of health promotion is active participation from the public. People should realize that health is determined by their way of life and the way they interact with the environment.

Thus, a central goal of health promotion is to shed some light on lifestyle and health behavior in general, personal characteristics related to lifestyle, perceived environmental conditions and perceived health. Health promotion includes environment and factors of different health services that enhance behavior favourable to health. It also encompasses actions of individuals and communities as a whole. A number of health-promoting practices have been identified as follows:

1. Exercise. The implications of aerobic exercise in sustaining both mental and physical health have been widely researched. Aerobic exercise refers to any sustained exercise which improves the body's utilization of oxygen (e.g., jogging, bicycling, jumping, and swimming) Exercise has been found to accompany a number of benefits as follows (Center for the Advancement of Health, 2004; Lee & King,2003):

- Maximizes oxygen consumption of the body
- Decreases resting heart rate
- Increases strength and efficiency of the cardiac muscles
- Decreases use of energy sources
- Increases slow wave sleep thereby the restorative function of sleep
- Increases high density cholesterol, unchanged total cholesterol
- Decreases cardiovascular diseases
- Decreases obesity
- Increases longevity
- Influences menstrual cycle length
- Decreases risk of some cancers
- Increases immune system functions
- Decreases negative mood

“The usual exercise prescribed for a normal adult is to store 30 minutes or more of moderate intensity activity on most, preferably all, days of the week and 20 minutes or more of vigorous activity at least 3 days a week” (Center for the Advancement of Health, 2000; Perri et al., 2002).

2. Maintaining a healthy diet. Diet is prominent manageable risk factor for many diseases. Hence, maintaining a healthy diet needs to be the target for

everyone. A broad array of diseases has been associated with dietary factors (McCaffery et al., 2001). Development of coronary heart diseases and hypertension has been found to be related to unhealthy dietary habits. Dietary habits have also been associated with the development of quite a lot of cancers: stomach, pancreas, colon, and breast (Steinmetz, Kushi, Bostick, Folsom, & Potter, 1994). Dietary modification— a high fiber diet—is necessary for prevention of polyp among persons who are at risk for colorectal cancers (Corle et al., 2001).

A poor diet may be problematic with other risk factors as well. For example, stress increases lipid reactivity (Dimsdale & Herd, 1982). Lipid levels in turn may influence intellectual functioning. It has been explained that serum cholesterol concentration may be a source of the levels of brain nutrients vital for mental competency (Muldoon, Ryan, Matthews, & Manuck, 1997).

3. **Weight control.** Weight control is imperative in recent years as the number of obesity is increasing in alarm rate in the population. Obesity, appears to be a risk factor for many disorders, both in its own right, as well as its effect on other risk factors (Kopelman, 2000). It is the main culprit for disability, and weight may be controlled by following a proper diet pattern and getting enough exercise. Maintaining optimal weight for an individual by regulating one's dietary habits essentially serves as an important health-promoting behavior. Determining one's basal metabolic rate is crucial in this regard so as to eat the right amount of food to prevent obesity as well as any eating disorders. The common allure of available, tasty junk foods must be geared and controlled to the greatest possible extent. The process needs de-cluttering of the body with adequate self-control. The psyche of the self must have the mantra of 'No, No' to toxic food elements.
4. **Sleep.** Maintaining healthy sleep hygiene is yet another health-promoting behaviour. This is because cognitive functioning, emotions, work performance,

and quality of life appear to be affected by insufficient sleep (less than seven hours a night) (Pressman & Orr, 1997). Certain high-risk occupations with night shifts may be accompanied by sleep disturbances resulting from alterations of the circadian rhythms, along with an imbalanced dietary habit that stores junk in the body. They are often associated with nightmares as one of the common symptoms (Neylan et al., 2002). Chronic insomnia may jeopardize the ability of an individual to secrete and respond to insulin, and can heighten the threat of getting coronary heart diseases (Bonner & Arand, 1998), amidst other harmful effects (Center for the Advancement of Health, 2004; Weintraub, 2004). Thus, it becomes important for individuals to maintain a healthy sleep routine.

5. **Rest, renewal, savoring.** An important set of health involves processes of relaxation and renewal that benefit people to restore their personal balance. Health benefits may be reaped from the ability to savor positive aspects of life (Gump & Matthews, 1998; Steptoe, Roy, & Evans, 1996). Health psychologists are of the opinion that rest, renewal, and savoring—involves activities like going out for holidays, enjoying a beautiful hiking path or sunset, being amidst nature and similar activities—tend to have health benefits.

Another important aspect of lifestyle modification is to take account of the following health-compromising behaviors so as to refrain from getting into their clutches:

Abstaining from substance dependence. “A person is said to be dependent on a substance when he or she repeatedly self-administers it, resulting in tolerance, withdrawal and compulsive behaviour” (American Psychiatric Association, 1994). Physical dependence is a state when the body adjusts to the substance and develops dependence, which often involves tolerance, on the part of the individual concerned. There is craving to consume a substance, which actually impedes the individual’s health. He or she thereby becomes dependent both physically and psychologically on the substance over time. This may also trigger withdrawal symptoms that are both physical and psychological in nature.

a) Alcoholism and problem drinking. Alcohol consumption has been associated with a number of disorders, including high blood pressure, stroke, liver cirrhosis, different forms of cancer and fetal alcohol syndrome in the offspring of addicted mothers (Higgins-Biddle, Babor, Mullahy, Daniels, & McRee, 1997). Alcoholics can show major sleep disorders that contribute to immune alterations that raise the risk for infection among alcoholics (Redwine, Dang, Hall, & Irwin, 2003). Excessive drinking is responsible for substantial cognitive impairments out of which many are irreversible (Goldman, 1983; McGuire, 1982). Problem drinking includes a number of specific patterns (Jellinek, 1960; Wanberg & Horn, 1983). They may result in significant problems associated with alcohol usage namely, social, psychological and medical in nature.

b) Smoking. The practice of smoking is considered as one of the single most causes of preventable death. It is also the chief cause of death in developed countries due to its connections with other risk factors (McGinnis et al., 1992). Smoking is responsible for at least 30% of all cancer deaths (American Cancer Society, 2001). Smoking not only increases risks for heart disease and lung cancer but chronic respiratory disorders, bronchitis, emphysema, damage due to accidents, lower birth weight in child, and retarded fetal development (Center for the Advancement of Health, 2000). Cigarette smokers are less health conscious and engage in unhealthy behaviours than

non-smokers (Castro, Newcomb, McCreary, & Baezconde-Garbanati, 1989). They are more accident-prone than non-smokers (Ryan, Zwerling, & Orav, 1992). Smoking makes one more likely to use other drugs in the future (Fleming, Leventhal, Glynn, & Ershler, 1989). In addition, the dangers of smoking are not confined to the smoker solely. Studies of second-hand smoke reveal that spouses, family members of smokers, and co-workers are at risk for a variety of health disorders (Marshall, 1986). Parental cigarette smoking may lower cognitive performance in adolescents by reducing blood oxygen capacity and increasing carbon monoxide levels (Bauman, Koch, & Fisher, 1989).

Thus, it is of dire necessity to curb such health-compromising behaviors to a greater extent and reinforce health-promoting ones so as to improve the overall quality of life of a large number of people. In this context, focusing on major strategies of de-cluttering the self is needed in attaining and maintaining health.

II. Focusing on De-cluttering the Self: The Key to Health Attainment

In life, everything in its natural form looks simple and beautiful, if we have mindful attention towards it. But most often, the general human tendency is to acquire more and more material things in order to achieve an aspired status in life or as an instant pleasure gratification. This process accumulates 'clutter' in our environments, in our bodies, and in the mental frames. Maintenance of life in its healthy form requires very few possessions, but the materialistic trend of the present era has had an effect on human minds. With achievement need riding high, people experience enormous stress due to the resultant competitive spree. This only gives rise to clouding of minds and clutter of space. Healthy life is like a clear

canvas with lesser stains. It is time that focus is placed on a non-materialistic or less materialistic mindset in order to have a clutter-free healthy canvas.

Clutter is a result of disequilibrium in one's shopping item and storage spaces, and is not a reflection of their organizational skills. In fact, a cluttered room reflects excessive consumption, information overload and procrastination. 'Cluttered' people have different thoughts and behaviour, as result of which their actions are affected. Disorganization not only has an impact on physical health but also affects the psychological health of people. Clutter contributes to poor air quality as well as quality of living. Its presence makes it difficult to clean the dust, which may contribute to the development of asthma (Nelson, 2008, p. 10). In addition, chronic disorganization results in creating clutter which compromises living space, threatens job security and injures relationships, all of which lead to lower self-esteem and lack of energy (Yiwei, 2015). These may result in (Silber, 2010, p. 91): "loss of memory, trouble focusing, lack of creativity, slower reaction time, poor decision-making ability, lack of sex drive, and irritability".

There are complex dynamics involved in relationships, and clutter is mixed up within those dynamics (Beverly, 2004). Therefore, clutter affects relationships adversely. Some common 'clutterer' traits include worrying about the future, having an ingrained deep sense of insecurity, procrastination and perfectionism, sense of guilt, confusion, having difficulty in decision-making, and being swayed away by the impact of consumerism.

Hence, there is a great need for engaging in de-cluttering habits so as to 'cleanse' the self and accept the 'givens' of life gracefully. Some of the major mental de-cluttering habits include the following:

Focusing on deep breathing. It is suggested to sit straight and not slouch to make room for the lungs to get oxygen. One needs to become aware of the areas where the body is tense, and mentally "breathe into" those areas, seeing them relax as one breathes in. Breathing through one's nose is recommended rather than the mouth. The nose prevents impurities and excessively warm or cold air from entering the body. The nose also can detect

poisonous gases that could be harmful to the individual.

During the time of inhalation, it is desirable to use abdominal breathing by gently pushing one's stomach outward, and breathing through as though one is filling the stomach. During exhalation, one needs to breathe out slowly and allow the stomach to return to its normal position. One also needs to pay attention to the difference between shallow breathing (which stops at the chest) and abdominal or diaphragmatic breathing (which fills the lower lobes of the lungs and encourages full oxygen exchange). The abdominal organs are massaged well by means of abdominal breathing which is brought about through the movements of the diaphragm. Slow, deep, rhythmic breathing is necessary to get rid of negative thoughts and have control over the mind. This stimulates the parasympathetic nervous system which helps in reducing the heart rate, relaxing muscles, calming the mind, and brain.

Meditation. Meditation is an intensely personal experience. The purpose is to promote equanimity. It is a peaceful mental state being free from distractions. It is calming of mind to provide clarity in daily life and to be more thoughtful of others in the process of "being" for oneself. This is a simple act of emptying one's mind of the usual mental chatters and progressively moving towards the deeper levels of the mind. The best approach is one of a relaxed "not knowing" and complete open-mindedness. Meditation, thus, seems to be a path without end. The practice is "just sitting", without intention or expectation and without impatience or disappointments. It is a journey of the limited self to vastness(Fontana,1999, p. 15). Being quiet in meditation, one becomes the experiencer of the limitless nature of mind and discourse of a new world of interest and wonder. Meditation makes one clear-sighted in life and an effective person within. Being sensitive and compassionate regarding the natural world is its primary gift. It generates a sense of unity and interdependence of all things, and

an awareness of what it means to be human. In the meditative fold, there seems to be a flow of thoughts of varied nature at four different levels (Sanyal, 2017).

1. The lowest level has “negative thoughts” including feelings of anger, fear, sadness, regret and unease. These thoughts make one egotistical and lazy.
2. Level of “wasteful thoughts” includes worrying thoughts.
3. Level of necessary thoughts send reminder of many things to do.
4. The highest level is one of “positive thoughts” that encourages peace, harmony, creativity, love, and happiness.

Meditative journey helps one to move from the lowest to the highest level of thoughts in the self-actualizing process. The clarity and enhanced concentration produced by meditation helps the mind to work effectively at all levels. The net gain is a new perspective, a new dimension of awareness to see oneself and the world around.

To maintain mind-body harmony, treatment of health-related problems and overall well-being, meditation practices are much more used. The long-term benefits of meditation showed in the study by Fergusson, Bonshek, & Bondigues (1995) that it reduces stress and enhances happiness, self-confidence, and general efficiency. Meditative folds may reduce professional stresses, anxiety and depression, while improving empathy, life-satisfaction and self-compassion of professionals in healthcare fields (Shapiro, Schwartz, & Bonner, 1998). Additionally, meditation is said to enhance essential qualities like tranquility, patience, concentration, memory and definitely empathy. Other ability points enhanced by meditation are calmness, self-actualization, self-acceptance, openness of the self—the ones that can be beneficial for individuals including mental health practitioners (Germer, Siegel, & Fulton, 2005). The personal practice of meditation is reported to deepen individuals’ understanding of contemplative experiences, increase their insight into diagnosis of client’s difficulties, and enhance therapeutic efficiency. Such efficiency would be the incorporation of attention, emotional intelligence, equanimity, motivation, and moral maturity.

Reframing one’s negative thoughts. Inculcating the reframing habit by first noticing

one's thought patterns and intruding them before they go beyond control appears to serve as a savior from being surrounded by negative thoughts. This may be done by employing certain strategies as follows:

- Being a 'watcher' of the self
- Naming the thought
- Just saying "No" to worrying
- Understanding the triggers of over-thinking and negativity
- Distracting oneself
- Challenging the thought and replacing the same
- Practicing acceptance
- Taking mindful action
- Setting up a worry-timer

III. De-cluttering the Surroundings

De-cluttering one's surroundings in terms of our homes, workspace, and such engages one to become 'free' of multiple stimuli in the sensory field that otherwise would have competed for neural representation in the brain, resulting in chaos and restricting one's ability to focus and process information. Clutter steals one's focus, making the individual feel overwhelmed, distracted and agitated. The momentary pleasures that could have been experienced by the self are robbed by means of clutter.

A person can engage himself or herself in this de-cluttering exercise by first beginning from where he or she spends most of the time. One can also set up a schedule which maybe regularly maintained to clean the 'clutter'. He or she also needs to deal with indecision on a moment-to-moment basis so as to successfully de-clutter the external space. One also needs to work quickly and inculcate some practices so as to enjoy the process.

It is also worth mentioning at this juncture that one needs to simplify one's digital life as well so as to have a sense of freedom with regard to one's virtual life in the current era. One need to be cautious about the duration spent on such activities, whether at all the

activities are relevant for the individual concerned, to prioritize one's activity frame, to de-clutter devices from time to time as well, and to become aware of one's own digital mindset (Scott & Davenport, 2016).

Simplifying one's activities can be done by focusing on three important daily goals, building a 'sacred time' (where the individual simply does absolutely nothing, and just remains as he or she 'is'), leaving work on time, taking a 'digital sabbatical' (in terms of usage of smartphones, laptops, tablet computers, and so on), harnessing the power of flow and focus, monitoring one's emotional state, and the like. Procrastination may be overcome through simplifying one's distractions by planning ahead, understanding one's own priorities, removing distractions as much as practicable, engaging in mindfulness practice, and the like. Further, actions may be simplified by eating meals mindfully, cleaning the house mindfully, walking mindfully, experiencing nature mindfully, paying attention to different part of the body mindfully, exercising mindfully, and soon.

Thus, training one's mind is the mental equivalent of tidying one's house. It is a habit one must repeat daily in order to stay on the top. Managing one's thoughts requires commitment and practice. It also requires moment-to-moment awareness of one's mental state. Hence, attaining self-control over one's impulses appears to help an individual to remain healthy.

Conclusion

To summarize, it may be noted that mindful attention to the different 'givens' of life and restraining oneself from instant pleasure points appear to hold the key for attaining health in the long run. The sources of immediate gratification need to be identified so that one can develop self-controlling leashes on them, and enjoy the fragrances of life from a genuine perspective. This is expected to make individuals self-disciplined by means of physical and mental exercises of de-cluttering the self and the environment. Health can then serve as a treasure to cherish and be embraced with pleasure.

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